

“Graduating is the goal. With the State cuts to dropout prevention, the Dallas County system offers the best chance for truant students to get back in class and graduate.” Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins

#### Additional Information Below:

In 2003, Senate Bill 358 authorized the creation of the Dallas County Truancy Courts. That same year, Dallas County Commissioners Court began operating the centralized truancy court system to hear and adjudicate cases filed by participating school districts relating to alleged violations of Texas Education Code Section 25.093. *Parent Contributing To Nonattendance* or Section 25.094. *Failure To Attend School*. Currently, six independent school districts (Dallas, Garland, Highland Park, Mesquite, Richardson and Sunnyvale) file in our court system. Texas Can! Academy and a few charter schools also file in our system.

The cases in our courts are heard by full-time magistrates who only hear truancy cases. Our truancy magistrates are licensed to practice law in the State of Texas and attend regular training on juvenile justice issues. The average legal experience of our truancy judges is 26 years.

These magistrates are chosen by my office based on their extensive background in juvenile justice and receive annual evaluations. The system is managed by a Program Coordinator who compliments her degree in criminal justice with more than 10 years of experience in juvenile justice issues. She serves as the liaison for each district with their respective local court. Each court has a trained case manager and the staffing provided is trained to meet each district's goals and objectives for decreasing truancy and increasing graduation rates.

The strength of our system is that our dockets are not crowded with other issues – truancy cases are our only focus. Participating school districts find that our ability to process cases sooner rather than later is key to getting the students back into the classroom. Our courts now receive and hear cases in a time frame that allows the court to address truancy and failing grades before the end of a six-week grade period.

Additionally, our unified system provides Juvenile Case Managers to assist in addressing the myriad of issues involved in absenteeism. We work with more than 40 different service providers whose missions are specific to underlying issues facing many of our youth. With their assistance, students are successful in resolving drug dependency, mental health, family violence, and anger management issues which contributed to their truancy problem.

Our comprehensive approach has proven to be effective.

- **Last month, in passing SB 1234 the state legislature adopted Dallas County's system of staggered fines and recommended all counties consider using case managers, a practice pioneered by Dallas County.**
- **Dallas Independent School District reports a 90.5 percent graduation rate of students appearing in our Truancy Courts compared to 74.6 percent for DISD graduation rates as a whole.**
- **DISD reports that 93.6 percent of their students were still enrolled in school following their first appearance in Truancy Court and that 84 percent of those students were promoted to the next grade level.**
- **DISD reports a 12 percent decrease in the dropout rate in the last four years beginning with the class of 2007, the first class to begin high school with the county truancy courts hearing FTAS cases. Garland – 1.1 percent; Mesquite – 1.2 percent and Richardson - 2 percent also report a decrease.**

**In all courts, 28 percent of students were attendance compliant at first review hearing requiring no further court intervention**